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ABSTRACT

This presentation: (1) outlines three educational approaches to moral development; (2) explains Piaget's stages of moral judgment; (3) reviews Piaget's ideas about the development of children's concepts of justice; and (4) discusses comments by contemporary educators concerning moral education and its implications. Outlined in Part I are character education, values clarification, and the cognitive-developmental approach to moral development. Part II reviews pre-moral, heteronomous, and autonomous stages of moral development. Implications of the stages are pointed out. Part III reviews immanent, retributive, and distributive categories of justice reasoning. Part IV explores ideas of Jean Piaget, Neil Postman, and Constance Kamii for suggestions of ways to support moral development and avoid indoctrination during children's early years. (RH)

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CAN EDUCATION BE SEPARATED FROM MORAL DEVELOPMENT?

Gwendolyn Rowe Gage

This presentation is divided into four parts: The first part outlines the three educational approaches to moral development; the second part explains Piaget's stages of moral judgment; the third covers the topic of justice; and the fourth discusses comments by today's educators regarding moral education and its implications.

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PART I

We will begin by taking a look at the three educational approaches to moral development. What I have found most interesting, in reading about Jean Piaget and his theory of moral judgment, is clarification of two terms that are frequently associated with the topic of moral development: character education and values clarification.

I have put together a chart, to provide helpful insight as you consider the stand that your school has taken regarding the teaching of moral values. This chart is based on an article written by Lawrence Kohlberg (1). In the area of moral development, Kohlberg is recognized for having expanded and expounded on Piaget's theories, except that Kohlberg has worked predominantly with older students. He identifies himself very closely with the cognitive-developmental approach to education, and morality in particular.

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Character education (see Figure 1) is often portrayed as a form of indoctrination. Kohlberg believes that character-education programs tend to include a set of universal values, which represents arbitrary decisions made by a group of people.

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THREE APPROACHES TO MORAL EDUCATION

Figure 1

		APPROACHES		
		CHARACTER EDUCATION	VALUES CLARIFICATION	COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL
METHODOLOGY	FORMAT	didactic indoctrination	peer discussion no indoctrination	peer discussion spontaneous occasions no indoctrination
	VALUES	universal set	random set	random, although specific on occasion
	SELECTION	by authority	by children	
	AUTHORITY	vested in teacher	not vested in teacher	not vested in teacher
	GOAL	instilling of value	self-awareness	self-awareness plus understanding of justice

These people select values which, in their opinion, are universal, but which may or may not be truly universal. The definitions of the words chosen to represent the values, such as "honesty" or "punctuality", are relative definitions, and are generally based on culture or the opinions of authority.

In character-education programs, the authority is vested in the instructor or the responsible adult. It is generally conceded that discussions of the selected values between students and adults will result in correct responses regarding the particular values under discussion, and that each response must win adult approval. This approach may be considered to be very didactic--from teacher to student.

Character-education programs do have a goal, which is, of course, to instill these values in the hearts and minds of those with whom the educators are working.

Another approach to moral education, called "values clarification", is noted in the second column of Figure 1. When using this approach, there is a definite attempt not to indoctrinate--to avoid indoctrination at all costs. It is understood that there are no universal values, and no authority is vested in the teacher. In fact, the teacher's opinion is not to be imposed upon the students.

An underlying assumption in the values-clarification approach is that discussion generates self-awareness. Discussion here can be characterized as open and Socratic in format. The selection and definition of values or topics are elicited from the children, and all conclusions are based on the children's own judgments, opinions or experiences. Supposedly, as peers talk with one another about ideas or value dilemmas, the self-awareness that is generated is sufficient to foster

moral development. Self-awareness is, in other words, the goal. It has no aim in terms of getting across a particular value. Kohlberg described this approach as having ethical relativity, in the sense that there are no correct answers.

With the cognitive-developmental approach, the adults in authority avoid a sense of indoctrination, do not necessarily acknowledge universal values, and certainly agree that authority is not vested distinctly in the teacher. The teacher and student discuss the student's thoughts and opinions as situations arise, which brings the student to an awareness of what he believes to be right, and encourages him to go beyond this awareness, to an understanding of the concept of justice. With older students, group discussion is frequently and effectively used here.

The cognitive-developmental approach provides no pat responses for a teacher to use when confronted with inappropriate behavior; rather, he is responsible for identifying the student's stage of development. In other words, he does not just take the statement of the student at face value, but actually reflects on it and endeavors to perceive the student's point of view. By questioning the student, the teacher determines the type of reasoning the student is using. With this information, he attempts to uplift the student's thought by helping him perceive other needs and points of view regarding the particular situation.

PART II

Early in the history of education, John Dewey, one of the forerunners of the cognitive-developmental approach to education, recognized that "moral education, like intellectual education, has its basis in stimulating the active thinking of the child about moral issues and decisions. It is called developmental, because it sees the aims of moral education as movement through moral stages." (2)

Dewey worked during an era that we now call "idealism." One man, who began his work many years after Dewey and adopted his line of thought regarding moral development, was Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist. Piaget was interested in epistemology, which is the study of the origin of ideas and the acquisition of knowledge. He focused his study on the moral development of young children, and used a rather simple technique: He "got down on their level". For example, he sat on the ground and played marbles with them. In the process of playing games such as this, he asked many questions, such as: How did rules begin? Can they be changed? Have rules always been the same as they are today? It was through the answers to questions such as these that Jean Piaget developed his concepts about the moral development of children.

The first level of moral development is labeled the pre-moral stage. Here, the child has no sense of obligation to any rules. He actually has no consciousness of there being rules. Generally, this stage is found in the very young child, from birth to approximately three years of age.

The second stage is referred to as the heteronomous stage. Here, authority is seen as omniscient (all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful) and as coming from an outside source, generally the parent or adult in charge. It is obeyed by the child in spirit and in letter. An example of heteronomous moral understanding is illustrated when a young child believes that lying to an adult is worse than lying to a peer, reasoning that the adult, not the peer, instituted the prohibition in the first place.

Piaget called the third stage of development, experienced at ages 8 to 12, the autonomous stage. During this stage, a sense of mutual respect and cooperation

regarding rules begins to grow between the adult and the child. The child actually gives his assent to a rule, and does not just accept the fact that a rule is a rule.

At this point in the child's moral development, his mystical respect for law, which was based on his perception of law as something untouchable and transcendental in origin, has faded, in light of his understanding that cooperation can lead to new rules based on needs. Cooperation can liberate the individual from egocentrism (seeing and thinking only from one's own perspective) and introduce a new and more immanent concept of rules.

None of these stages of development is exclusive. "A given individual may, for example, have reached the stage of autonomy with regard to a certain group of rules" says Piaget, "while his consciousness of these rules, together with the practice of certain more subtle rules, will still be coloured with heteronomy" (3). Each new set of rules will require the individual to develop a new plane of thought or reflection. The issues involved are individual unfoldment of moral understanding; how this understanding benefits society; and the effort of society to support the moral development of the individual.

In the story, ZORBA THE GREAT, a butterfly is prematurely brought to life by the breath of a man. Just as the butterfly passes through the stages of its life cycle, each individual in our society will naturally pass through the stages of moral development, if there is no outside influence to deter or disturb this unfoldment. Without allowance for this progressive growth, an individual--like the butterfly in the story--may emerge, but with wings crumpled and useless. Balancing the individual and society's needs is challenging. Society often finds

itself in the position of the man in the story, who is eager to hurry the process because of his great interest in the final product. He expects a beautiful butterfly; society expects a well-adjusted individual. Yet, the man's artificial, warm environment can not unfurl the butterfly's wings, and it withers. If society does not develop a clearer understanding of moral development, it may find itself with morally withered people. Society must acknowledge the benefits that can be realized through the concept of moral development that produces autonomous individuals.

Today, as always, the area of moral development needing the greatest amount of attention from society is the abuse of authoritative power during the heteronomous stage. Piaget warns us that ". . . good and bad are simply conceived of as being that which is or is not in conformity with adult rules. This essentially heteronomous morality of obedience leads to all sorts of distortions. Since it is incapable of leading the child toward that autonomy of the personal conscience that constitutes the morality of the good, as opposed to that of pure duty, it thus fails to prepare the child for an acceptance of the essential values of contemporary society. This explains the efforts of the new education theory to supplement the deficiencies of externally imposed discipline with an internal discipline based upon the social life of the children themselves." (4) Educators of young children at this level offer many suggestions and demonstrations of how to reduce this authoritative power and promote cooperation.

Lest some teachers fear loss of control (and that concept of control needs to be carefully examined), Piaget affirms, ". . . the new method of education is not to eliminate the social action of the teacher, but rather to achieve a reconciliation between respect for the adult and cooperation among the children, and, as far as

possible, to reduce the constraint exercised by the former in order to transform it into a higher form of cooperation." (5) "In other words, just as a pupil can recite his lessons without understanding them, and can substitute verbalism for rational activity, so a child obeying is sometimes a spirit subjugated to an external conformism, but who does not understand the real meaning or facts surrounding the rules he obeys, nor the possibility of adapting them or making new ones in different circumstances." (6)

PART III

The first stage of justice classified by Piaget is immanent justice, the belief that there is punishment in the act. For example, if a bridge breaks while a child is walking across it, the child believes that he is being punished for having walked across the bridge. Children feel that the punishment is in the object or in the activity. Although this is not an advanced concept of justice (if you play with fire, you get burned), it often represents reality--the truth--so this first level doesn't necessarily have to be looked at as the lowest level. This belief is often false, of course, as young children tend to take it to extremes and perceive events as supernatural. For example, a child might believe that a bolt of lightening will hit him if he does wrong, even though there is no correlation between a bolt of lightening and the wrong he plans to commit.

The second level of justice is retributive justice. Here, punishment is viewed as necessary, because there was an act of disobedience. This is probably where most people are operating: If there is an act of disobedience, there must be a punishment. Three- and four-year-olds are notorious for saying, "So-and-so did such-and-such." The expectation is that something must now happen to so-and-so, because he is not following the rules to a T; that there has to be some action

taken to correct the infraction.

The third level of justice classified by Piaget is distributive justice, which takes into account a multitude of factors: How old is the individual? What was the motive? Was it an act of clumsiness, or was it intentional? Ideally, most teachers are working at this level of distributive justice. As educators, our job is to ask these questions of the children, to help them gain new perspective. We want the children to begin to see that there are factors that are being taken into consideration; that the adult isn't ignoring the situation. "I" messages are also helpful, because it is important that children be informed about how we, as their teachers, perceive what is happening and why we are making the decisions that we are making.

All children are passing through these stages as part of their moral development. It is like any of the other developmental processes: physical, social, emotional or cognitive. We want to help them progress to child-to-child interaction, or learning from their peers. The cognitive-developmental approach emphasizes child-to-child interaction, fosters it, and promotes it.

We, in the field of early childhood education, are particularly fortunate, because most of us recognize socialization as the primary factor in the classroom; thus, neither moral development, nor an understanding of justice, can be separated from socialization in the early childhood classroom.

PART IV

Many educators have spoken or written recently about the many facets of moral development and have expressed their concerns about its being neglected. Two such

educators are Neil Postman and Constance Kamii.

In Neil Postman's book, TEACHING AS A SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY, written in the mid 1970's, he encourages teachers to develop students' thinking skills, and advocates that every subject area should be based on thinking. Recently, in an interview with Mr. Postman by THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, he talked about Sesame Street, the television program for children. (7) Sesame Street began on a fine premise, he says, but has lost sight of its goal and is now teaching children to enjoy watching television, rather than teaching children to think. Postman urges parents, educators and all adults to seriously consider whether or not this medium is doing what it set out to do.

What do Postman's thoughts have to do with moral development? In the cognitive-developmental approach, there is an essential correlation between the development of reason and logic, and moral development; thus, it would be very difficult to dissociate the two. Dewey, and all the proponents of the cognitive-developmental approach that have followed him, have advocated that the goal of education is to help children think. They have pointed out that this is based on the fact that the child is constantly taking in information and trying to make sense of it. He is, as Piaget says, "reinventing" each concept that he perceives, in an endeavor to make it his own. This is why the child's role models and visual models, which include television, must be scrutinized by adults, and ought to reflect the basic beliefs of the adults.

A specialist in the field of early childhood education, Constance Kamii addresses the issue of democracy at great length in her most recent book, YOUNG CHILDREN REINVENT ARITHMETIC. She illustrates how the use of mathematical materials in the

first-grade setting--use of games as opposed to workbook pages--will actually help increase the autonomy of the children. She says, "Piaget's theory about how children learn moral values is fundamentally different from empiricist and common-sense views. The common-sense view is that the child acquires moral values by internalizing them from the environment. According to Piaget, children acquire moral values, not by internalizing or absorbing them from the environment, but by constructing them for themselves, through interaction with other people." (8) The key phrase here is "through interaction with other people". She advocates a curriculum where children are naturally involved in interaction with one another, This interaction leads to discussions of fair play and rules. The teacher becomes a support system, helping out by taking the role of negotiator.

Kamii describes a classroom in which the block area was very orderly: no children were bumping into one another's structures, and there was harmonious interaction and much cooperation. When asked what she and the children had done to achieve this atmosphere, the teacher explained that when she had originally set up the block area, she allowed all children into it without imposing any restrictions. The atmosphere became disruptive and inharmonious. The teacher announced to the children that this would not be acceptable, and that they would have to resolve this and cooperate with one another. She explained to them that the block area would be closed for a specified time period, after which its availability to them would be continued, based upon their mutual respect for the rights of one another and their harmonious interaction in the block area. The teacher maintained that providing the opportunity for them to perceive the necessity for cooperation had helped in establishing this as the baseline for action and interaction in all areas of the classroom.

This example illustrates that rules will--and must--exist in the classroom where the cognitive-developmental approach is used. Although there is essentially no indoctrination, it does not necessarily follow that there are no rules. Rather, this approach offers the children an integral part in making decisions regarding the resolution of conflicts, which form the bases for establishing rules. This sets the tone for moral development based on justice.

It is important that children realize the part that they play, individually and collectively, in the application of rules, not necessarily in the establishment of the rules. Rules are necessary, and children must be encouraged to see their connectedness with these rules and why respect for the rules is helpful to them.

It is interesting to note that all three approaches to moral development have at their bases a desire to preserve democracy, not only as it pertains to this Country and its form of government, per se, but democracy as an idea or principle. Democracy is founded on self-government. Our forefathers saw that, ideally, every man, woman and child should come to be self-governing agents, because individuals who are self-governing are able to work together harmoniously. This conviction represents Piaget's third stage of moral development, the autonomous stage. At the autonomous stage, mutual respect and cooperation can exist, so that compromise and consensus can always be achieved. When conflicts arise, the resolutions reached are those that are most productive for all individuals, groups or societies involved.

Webster defines morality as "rules of conduct". Mary Ann Spencer Polaski, in her book on Jean Piaget, states, "the essence of morality is respect for a system of rules." (9) Piaget saw the socialization process as the nitty-gritty for studying

the moral development of children. As professionals in the field of early childhood education, we interact with children and watch children socialize with one another every day. We have the opportunity--and the responsibility--to help children see and develop respect for our systems of rules. To achieve this, not only do we have to choose rules that are mutually beneficial, but the children, too, have to be able to see the rules as being mutually beneficial.

REVIEW

There are three basic approaches to moral development: character education, values clarification and the cognitive-developmental approach. The school where I am employed uses a list of 14 character qualities, which students and staff review together throughout the year. This form of moral education represents character education. Many schools use DUSO (Developing Understanding of Self and Others) or Magic Circle. These represent the values-clarification method of moral education. Some adapt the cognitive-developmental approach to support moral development.

The three stages of moral development outlined by Piaget are defined differently by various authors and texts. One refers to the stages as pre-moral, obedience to adult authority, autonomous reciprocity and autonomous-ideal reciprocity. The three that I have presented here (pre-moral, heteronomous and autonomous) give a general overview of the developmental process.

The three levels of justice as presented here are: immanent, retributive and distributive. Immanent means that the punishment is perceived as being within the act. Retributive means that punishment is necessary because a rule was disobeyed, and distributive justice means that the individual is able to take into account a multitude of factors and arrive at a valid consequence.

Originally, the purpose of schooling was to teach children how to read Bible passages, because the people who founded our Country had a desire to preserve religious freedom. Conversely, the idealists of the late 1800's and early 1900's who wrote about schooling did not see education as religious instruction, but saw distinct differences between the two. Nevertheless, they also realized that moral education was important and inseparable from education, because it meant teaching the equality of men (generically speaking).

As we enter the 21st century, the teachings of the Bible and moral education have vanished from most curriculums. Where moral or values education does exist, it is often a "hidden" curriculum. The work of Piaget and Kamii may very well show us how to support moral development and avoid indoctrination during the early years. My preparatory work for this presentation inspired me to reflect on how I support the moral development of the children in my own school setting. Given the definitions of the three distinct approaches to moral education, I analyzed this, and saw how integrative the cognitive-developmental approach can be when I do not separate, in my own thought, the child's intellectual development from his moral development. I hope that you, too, will reflect on what you have read here, and consider adaptations to your programs. As Kamii points out, there can be no "value-free" education.

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FOOTNOTES

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